

Reflections '89

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REFLECTIONS

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Table of Contents

| | | |
|-----------------------|------------------------------------|--------------|
| Melissa Brown | <i>Louise Anderson</i> | Frontispiece |
| Henry Styron | <i>Artist in Pain</i> | 1 |
| Craig Lewis | <i>Picture Memory</i> | 2 |
| Stephen Wade Gamm | <i>Illusion</i> | 3 |
| Michelle O'Brien | <i>Reprise</i> | 4 |
| Ernest Blankenship | <i>The Squirrel and the Hawk</i> | 5 |
| Kathy Henson | <i>A man undertook to paint...</i> | 6 |
| Joan Kyles | <i>For Pam</i> | 7 |
| Susan Bell | <i>Elizabeth at Twelve</i> | 8 |
| Scott Lawlor | <i>The Most Deadly Threat</i> | 9 |
| Deborah Ann Cravey | <i>Adobe Man</i> | 11 |
| Billie Ford Dixon | <i>Cheated</i> | 12 |
| Joan Kyles | <i>Shadows on the Mountain</i> | 13 |
| Dawn Camp | <i>Water Billowing</i> | 14 |
| Ren Chaskelis | <i>My Viking</i> | 15 |
| Melissa Henslee | <i>Musing on Despair</i> | 16 |
| Les Brown | <i>Ocrakoke</i> | 17 |
| Mary Beth Searcy | " " | 18 |
| Deborah Ann Cravey | <i>Lonesome Thunder</i> | 19 |
| Craig Maglii | <i>Jackhammer</i> | 20 |
| Melissa Diann Brown | <i>Michelangelo</i> | 21 |
| Gene Penner | <i>Unknown Stranger</i> | 22 |
| Anna Christine Vaughn | <i>Forsaken</i> | 23 |
| Les Brown | <i>Lawndale-Belwood Road</i> | 26 |
| Sumi Watanabi | <i>All American Boy</i> | 27 |

| | | |
|-----------------------|--|----|
| Joan Kyles | <i>Jericho</i> | 28 |
| Joyce Compton Brown | <i>Mill-town Sunday</i> | 29 |
| Ren Chaskelis | <i>Novelette</i> | 30 |
| Lynn Carpenter-Kecter | <i>Destined to Be Trapped</i> | 30 |
| Gene Penner | <i>The Mighty Hunter</i> | 31 |
| Michelle O'Brien | <i>An Alternative</i> | 32 |
| Deborah Ann Cravey | <i>Wise Words</i> | 32 |
| Henry D. Styron | <i>Jesus Who?</i> | 33 |
| Ernest Blankenship | <i>Reincarnation?</i> | 34 |
| Michelle O'Brien | <i>American Dream</i> | 35 |
| Joyce Compton Brown | <i>Sylvia and the Bees</i> | 36 |
| Craig Lewis | <i>To the Existence, "God"</i> | 37 |
| Lisa J. Sabbarth | <i>The Final Curtain</i> | 38 |
| Christy Diane Hart | <i>The 51st State</i> | 39 |
| Karen Martin | <i>The Tower</i> | 39 |
| Gene Penner | <i>Easter, 1970</i> | 40 |
| Dennis Quinn | <i>Long Thoughts That in My Mind Doth Rest</i> | 41 |
| Henry D. Styron | <i>Who Decides What's Real, Anyway?</i> | 42 |
| Billie Ford Dixon | <i>Ramesses</i> | 43 |
| Dawn Elaine Camp | <i>Tall Wooden Soldiers</i> | 44 |
| Sharon Nichols | <i>Through the Pages of my Mind</i> | 44 |
| Craig Lewis | <i>Prince Without a King</i> | 45 |
| Melissa Diann Brown | <i>Fig Leaf</i> | 46 |
| Joan Kyles | <i>Pendulum</i> | 47 |
| Melissa Diann Brown | <i>Cottage</i> | 48 |

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LITERARY CONTEST

Each year the English Department of Gardner-Webb College sponsors a literary contest for all student submissions chosen for publication in Reflections. Faculty and nonstudent submissions are not eligible for the contest. All works are judged anonymously by the final contest judges. This year's judges were Dr. A. Frank Bonner, Mr. Thirlen Osborne, and Dr. William B. Stowe.

AWARDS

| | | |
|---------------|--------------------------------|---------------------|
| First Place: | <i>Shadows on the Mountain</i> | Joan Kyles |
| Second Place: | <i>Michelangelo</i> | Melissa Diann Brown |
| Third Place: | <i>Prince without a King</i> | Craig Lewis |

HONORABLE MENTION

| | |
|---------------------------|---------------------|
| <i>Artist in Pain</i> | Henry Styron |
| <i>Noticing the Green</i> | Craig Lewis |
| <i>Pendulum</i> | Joan Kyles |
| <i>Fig Leaf</i> | Melissa Diann Brown |

ART CONTEST

The Art Department of Gardner-Webb College has sponsored an art contest for all student submissions chosen for publication in Reflections. Faculty and nonstudent submissions are not eligible for the contest. All works are judged by the final contest judges. This year's judges were Charlotte Slice, Richard Drye, and Susan Bell.

AWARDS

| | | |
|---------------|-------------------------|---------------------|
| First Place: | <i>Louise Anderson</i> | Melissa Diann Brown |
| Second Place: | <i>All American Boy</i> | Sumi Watanabi |
| Third Place | <i>Ramesses</i> | Billie Ford Dixon |

HONORABLE MENTION

| | |
|-----------------------------------|---------------------|
| <i>Jackhammer</i> | Craig Meglii |
| <i>Marie Antoinette's Cottage</i> | Melissa Diann Brown |

Louise Anderson

Melissa Diann Brown



Artist in Pain

Enter a dimly-lit room
Illuminated only by a
Fluorescent clock
and two activated
highway-distress markers.

Behold a sullen minstrel
Ablaze with apathy.
He and reality had a disagreement,
and they went their separate ways.

And so he sits,
creating breathtakingly beautiful music,
For lack of anything
Better
to do.

Henry Styron

Picture Memory

I have a picture memory
Of my father and me
*Not the only memory of him I have,
But the only one to bring a glimmer of recognition;
And not a true memory, but rather like
An old, fading painting, one I periodically retouch
With occasional glances at an old photograph*
In this picture I am dancing, young and exuberant
I faintly recall the occurrence
My checkered blue shirt and brown shorts
And the brown room are all in clear focus
I vaguely recollect them all
And close behind me, at my left, sits my father;
But whether he watches me, and what his expression shows,
I cannot remember --
The picture shows only his legs --

I have a true memory
Of my father and me
The only such memory I have,
Culled from my experience without a photo reminder,
Distorted by time and distance
Into something surreal and unreal
In this memory I am minuscule, holding some toy
I am looking up at my father, he's big as a tree
I recollect surprise and happiness at seeing him here
He is by the closet, perhaps getting his coat
I ask him if he is home for the day
He replies that he is not, he must go out again
I recall recurrence, and disappointment --

I harbor no such disappointment now,
I house no anger, or even curiosity, at this time,
For I have only one picture memory,
And one detached memory, almost like a picture in my hand,
Of a man I do not know.

Craig Lewis

Illusion

Gazing in awe, as shimmering crystal water flows endlessly over the emerald green rocks.

The sun in its beauty radiates beams of crystal light through the water as the ripples, like diamonds, roll swiftly by.

My hands:

Like an illusion

Under the water.

The blood won't wash off...I can't seem to get my hands wet.

...An illusion...

I know the water is real: I can feel the coolness; I can see the sun gleaming, even taste the crispness through the smell that only a clean mountain stream possesses.

The blood is real:

Dried like brown icing

On a child's fingers

Turned to stone.

Like scales on my hands,

It has dried and become

A part of me.

...A demon has scales...

Still, it is real.

I retain the smell of death on me. The blood is wet on my uniform, preserved in that state by my sweat.

It smells like warm death, cooking slowly in an oven.

...An illusion it's not...

Maybe it's just my mind. I still can't get this beautiful clear water to dissolve the clots. It won't even soften them.

Only you,

Only you can help me now.

Come forth!

No feelings.

No pain.

Shield me now!

My breathing becomes intense as my eyes open wide.

Getting up, I stomp in the stream. A cloud of soot emerges from the disruption. I wash my hands and leave.

Stephen Wade Gamm

Reprise

Call to darkness,
cover me.

I'll not see,
I'll not be seen.

Feel the shadows
swallow me.

Embrace me
and embraced be.

Michelle O'Brien

The Squirrel and the Hawk

The squirrel worked diligently building its nest in the fork of a tree.
It gathered straw, leaves, and whatever it could find
And carried them up the tree and carefully put them in place
To make a cozy nest in which to sleep and store its food.
It carried acorns, nuts, pine cones, fruit, and other edible bits of greenery
And stored them diligently for its winter's feast.
Meanwhile the hawk soared lazily over-head
Occasionally whistling but watching the movements of the squirrel.
When the squirrel was finished and ready to settle in
The hawk thought that it was time.
He dived from a great distance
Striking the squirrel half in and half out of its house.
The hawk's talons clutched the squirrel firmly,
But the impact shattered the house.
All the residue of the house and food fell
And was once more scattered on the ground.

Ernest Blankenship

A Man Undertook to Paint

A man undertook to paint his house one morning.

After several days he was finished except for the highest gable.

So he got a ladder and leaned it up high against the house.

And climbed up slowly with his bucket and brush.

He was happy and his wife was satisfied; she'd been nagging him about
this for a long time.

He whistled a tune and his brush went back and forth rhythmically.

And a sparrow whizzed around the corner and dodged the man's nose by
centimeters.

He lost his balance, teetered and fell.

And the paint lay like white blood on the man and the ground and the
house.

Kathy Henson

For Pam

Women know what men
can only surmise:
that love, like the moon,
has a dark side
which is cold, remote,
scarred.

And we are bound, fused,
sister survivors of our
own personal holocausts,
branded by our womanhood
like some Auschwitz tattoo.
So we bequeath our legacy
of pain to our daughters
and pray they become warriors,
yet we cannot teach them how.

Joan Kyles

"Elizabeth at Twelve"

Susan Carlisle Bell



The Most Deadly Threat

2/22/86

I can't think of anything of value to say but I must keep up with the world in which I live.

Headlines; THE SOVIET UNION HAS THREATENED TO FIRE THE FIRST NUCLEAR MISSILE TOWARDS THE UNITED STATES TODAY. PRESIDENT REAGAN SAYS "We will not die without a fight. We must stay together as a country and perish as a union of people who have the courage to..."

The world is no more. The Russians have destroyed us, and we have attempted to destroy them. But what's the use if we're all going to die anyway? We thought we destroyed each other, but have we? No. We have just destroyed ourselves. I should know. I'm looking at the world from a star call Clibus ZX-21. It's a star that I found while I was traveling in a spaceship many years ago. I somehow knew that the world would end this way. So I have taken a permanent vacation on this star that is far away. Now I have seen the world in which I have lived disappear in a single flash of bright colors. I know it's sad but I guess the Russians didn't love their children as much as we had hoped.

3/10/86

Life on this star is lonely. Sometimes I wish I had stayed in the world from which I came so I could have died with my people. I have found no enemy, friend, animal, or flower. Now I realize how lonely people can be.

I sometimes wonder if I spent enough time with my fellow people. I think about that question a great deal out here in space. After thinking about it I know the answer. The answer is no. Here I am stranded on a star with no one or nothing. Now I know the true meaning of loneliness.

4/25/87

Gee I hope my spaceship works. I haven't used this thing in a long time. I want to get off this damn star and find life somewhere else.

4/29/87

The ship has been traveling for a few days. But now on this date, (the 29th of April, 1987) I see a planet. I land the ship and look out the windows. At first I see nothing, but then suddenly a large group of people surrounds the ship. I hear many voices none of which I can understand. Some of the people begin knocking on the windows and door.

Slowly the violent noises of the barbaric people in the new world transform into a soft tap on my bedroom door. This sound gently wakes me, and as I open my eyes I am aware that this experience was a dream, one which was triggered by a string of words. "I can't think of anything of value to say, but I must keep up with the world in which I live."

2/23/86

After the dream the fears that I have concerning a nuclear war and its potential threat are more real than ever. I hope that someday the super powers of the world will be able to put down their toys of destruction and use words to obtain their goals.

1987

On the 8th day of the 12th month of this year the United States and the Soviet Union signed a treaty that would eliminate a whole class of nuclear missiles. Now my fears of the most deadly threat to this world are reduced because of the hope between these two countries.

Scott K. Lawlor

Adobe Man

A pregnant hush; Twilight breathes an anxious quiver of ceremonial passage

As the drums begin to rumble

And the scent of mist pursues the shadows of the jungle

It penetrates the humid ghosts of time,

Invites the sweating fog to writhe in rhythmic frenzy with the waves of a torch-fed flame

And I rumble, feel the rumble.

I slither down the warm follicles of your posture,

Flicking my pride about to moisten the heat of each crevice

While a thought-evoking taste of sanctity burns quiet through your smoldering pores:

To view your structure is to witness the grandeur of ancient architecture

My Mayan House of Truth

How you stiffly stand and beckon--

Bold and steady, you repeat the moon's soft rhythms in your darkest window's digital glance

--Making me rumble, feel the rumble...

I ascend you slowly to your golden summit,

Pausing at the altar with a desperate prayer to the motions of eternity

Tattooed walls of primitive wisdom, solid with centuries of sun-broiled magic,

Rise to break your silence.

Instinct calls me once again, (Hear the rumble...Hear the rumble)

Yearn to taste the dust left you nature's breath

You are the grandest of shadows

And I must offer myself in sacrifice

--If only to find the endless drums that echo the rumblings of my own reckless spirit.

Deborah Ann Cravey

Cheated

The new skin of my bedroom walls,
(A rose tinted semi-vinyl)
Achieves with its busy lace-and daisy emblem
A Victorian nuance.

Traveling

Retroverted,
Back into a world of high-topped boots,
Strait-laced times of straight faced minds --
There descends a sanity unfelt in higher-flying times of Coke and coke.

Imprisoned by a gilded frame
Grandsire and dam peer out, frozen in time --
Forever oblivious to the betrayal
Of honor, truth and Duty.

They think the barbershop still does
A nickel shoeshine.

Billie Ford Dixon

Shadows on the Mountain

He had come a long way
from the mossy hollows of Appalachia
to the mill village -- the row houses
distinguishable only by the
dreams of their tenants.
Some dreamed of moving up
at the mill, a better house,
a car.

Some only of going home to green mountains.

Daddy dreamed of music:
banjo, dulcimer, mandolin woke
from silence to his rugged hands.

In the evenings when the sky
turned soft and purple he would sit on the porch
and play simple songs of death
and lost loves, lonesome
mountains and wandering sons.

I would press against his paint
splattered legs, drawn to the
wild summer in his eyes,
sister to the moths that fretted
against the porch screen
straining toward the lamplight.
I longed for his hand to touch
me as lovingly as it stroked
the dulcimer resting on his lap.

The music splintered around me,
the sound of each note
sequestered.

I found other arms to hold me,
seeking that love which is sometimes
not hidden like shadows in darkness.
Yet there are nights
when I am orphaned by sleep
that the fragment of a tune or the sweet drift of honeysuckle
touches me, and I am
comforted by summer memories
as smooth and worn as prayer beads
strung by calloused hands.

Joan Kyles

Water Billowing

Water--billowing
And cresting, foaming, then receding
Very quickly.
Evening is coming. The
Sun is setting on the rolling water.

Dawn Camp

My Viking

I keep with me always the only picture of you in existence.
You insist upon remaining that far away from commonness.
It is the common man that you staunchly serve, using the same
enormous, calloused hands that easily span about my waist, lifting me
from my agonies.

The sole, fading and yellowed image freezes you forever in your
abandoned homeland.
Your mask doesn't even acknowledge the camera, nor does it lift for any
but the painfully chosen few.
Even then, the image we receive is as fuzzy about the edges as your
photograph.

Even my childhood knew your; watching your steps so firm and sure,
giant's body strong and unyielding.
Your future carefully planned, forcefully striding
through life while I stumbled about in your shadow,
often running headlong into your walls.
I come away bruised and bleeding, seeing your eyes
registering apology but your lips offering none.

My last goodby rang in October.
Imagine my shock when you refused to listen.
Why do you want to change your picture now?
To turn its cold, gray landscape to warmer climates.
You chose your backdrop years ago; it's far too late
to alter your format now. Those carefully structured
walls can never be torn down, not even by
their creator.

Ren Chaskelis

Musing on Despair

Perhaps, I am eating fruit from trees which will only bring me misery. I wander aimlessly through the garden of beautiful fruit, but none of them are for me. The fruit only sickens me after I have been tempted to try a bite. I lay me down at night to rest in a bower, but the bower is full of thorns, and my body and my spirit aches to move on. I sit under a tree to read or meditate in the garden, but the leaves of the tree begin to wither and to drop. Hence there is no shade. I attempt to pet the lion who dandles a lamb in his paw, and he suddenly becomes ferocious and menacing. I pick a rose which I know to have a pleasant smell, and my nostrils are filled with decay as the petals begin to fall to the ground. Yes! Paradise is filled with beauty, but at my touch, beauty, along with virtue and truth disappear. Where are you Father, my only source of light and truth? Why does my soul lack wisdom and purpose? Nurture that seed of love which you implanted in me at the time my soul felt life.

Melissa Henslee

Ocracoke

Arching wings break the burning sky
as trembling hands and eager eyes
try to capture the gifts
of the dying day.

Foolish are the eyes that refuse
to see the shimmering blend
of sky and sea, broken only
by the stilted legs of the egret
or the leap of a mullet.

A trio of young yellow crows
stands silhouetted near the silent,
black sculpture of the tranquil
executioner's blind,

The heron's blank red-circled
curious eye fills my scope
in untranslated communication as
the sea licks away the sands
of Ocracoke.

While the path of the skimmer's hunt
rips the quiet glass water before me,
the sun drops behind the silent sound,
leaving the tenuous narrow land to night.

Is there value in my witness on Ocracoke?
Am I worthy of more than the
greenhead or the mutilated crab
that struggles at the feet of the laughing gull?

It was a stereotype day
For a visit within the wrought iron gates.
The early morning shroud
Clung to my clothes and limp hair
Then sank into my soul.
An inescapable chill echoed within.

Step by step
Row after row,
I saw plastic flowers.
Even the faded petals
Of embarrassed poinsettias in March
Were clumped in that hideous green foam.

I reached my destination.
My pilgrimage had ended.
No, it wasn't a temple
Or a holy shrine,
But only a piece of white marble,
Inanimate, cold impenetrable.

The name had become
Just letters perfectly chiseled.
As well, the dates
Were only numbers.
A lifetime had been condensed
To a

Lonesome Thunder

How subtle the cry of lonesome thunder.
How it echoes the pride of solitude,
Rolling through mirrors of the past
As it fractures the glass of time

Tonight I feel your absence like an amputated limb
All around, the furniture stares,
dares me to prove my ownership
Silence drips,
I am left suspended.

My mind is drowned in a tide of visions--
Sweeping waves of future satisfactions I can't bring
myself to speak
They shoved me forward,
They haphazardly rip the flesh of my spirit,
They strain to pull the whole of me back to only last night,
Where we touched the raging embers of desire with our
innocent tongues
And swam to shore unscathed.

It was a flood;
The waters rose and rose, engulfing every free-flowing
thought in life-preserving passion
And then slowly, the storm subsided,
As we floated to personal islands, gently linked by our
pacific fingertips...
Whispered words of solidarity permeated the core of respect
--sealed our destinies for eternity
And our insecurities for the night.

Morning threatened,
Calling us to face the rain of daylight
A torrid embrace, a soul-lubricating kiss in a futile attempt
to summarize emotion,
And once again I'm on my own
Now a waning moon weeps steady as I sit in an isolated vacuum,
Consumed in an aching void and watching the sky for clouds.

Deborah Ann Cravey

Jackhammer

Craig Meglii



Michelangelo

Listen now to the songs you drew
With your pencil singing freely across the paper,
Though not one drunken line
Was discord in your masterpieces.

Gloat now, for the fruits of your skill
Have withstood the scoldings of the Master.
Piéta, once cuddled in stone,
Was freed by the kisses of your tools.

Strength and beauty harmonize,
And all the children you carved
Out of their marble wombs
Still thrive to sing their father's name.

Melissa Diann Brown

Unknown Stranger

The sudden awakening of Michael Jackson
screaming of how bad he is
followed by the sloshing of soap and
the splattering of water
the monotone whine of the hair dryer and
the crackling of grease dancing around the hot sausage

the metal birds which pierce the atmosphere
with the roar of a seashell a hundred times amplified

the bellowing thunder of twentieth century dinosaurs
ferociously burrowing, digging, and pushing mounds of soil

the gargling of Macks, Internationals, and Fergusons
along with Buicks, Cadillacs, and Rabbits
the authoritative insult of impatient horns mixed
with tires screeching with pain
crying to stop the scraping by the asphalt
sirens,
behind you, in front of you, beside you, coming, going

the seclusion of being in a small room
the level of silence is deafening
slowly small noises begin making themselves known
the crack of wood expanding underneath the sun's rays
the high pitched flutter of a fly's wing
your breathing
your heartbeat

i'm not alone

who are you
i don't know you
where did you come from

"I've always been here, you just couldn't hear me."

Gene Penner

Forsaken

She wearily lay among torn paper and abandoned, empty boxes and was aware of only the ticking grandfather clock and the hypnotizing lights of the tree. The house was still but the excited voices of happy children still echoed in her ears. Now a strange tranquility reigned over the house; her mother and sisters, exhausted from getting up at 5:30 am, had gone back to sleep, and only she was conscious of the mysterious, almost eerie sensation that had permeated not only the house, but also her heart. Suddenly the phone rang, interrupting the silence of Christmas day. She had no idea who it was, but when she answered she immediately recognized the still-familiar voice on the other end of the receiver. It was Him.

"Hello," she said.

"Hello," said He.

"How are you doing today?" she asked, trying to relay to Him that she really did not care.

"I'm fine, and you?" he asked in response. He also sounded nonchalant, but she knew that He was good at hiding feelings, thoughts, secrets.

"I'm doing great," she answered. "Are you having a merry Christmas?"

"Yes, thank you. How has yours been?"

"Wonderful," she replied. Polite words and phrases were almost depleted from her mind, and the line remained silent as she desperately searched her brain for another set of words. She tried to think of anything to say but kept running into dead ends.

"How is everyone there?" He questioned. She was extremely relieved that he had been able to find another safe topic of conversation.

"They are all fine. How is your family?"

"Oh, they are doing quite well. I will tell them that you asked."

She listened to the crackling connection, and she helplessly realized that the 500 miles which separated them was only minute in comparison to the distance that lay between their hearts. Moments passed, seeming like hours. She wanted to say other words, but there was nothing left to say. No more words existed that would keep her bitterness, hurt, and confusion locked safe in the deep darkness of her heart. And there was another feeling she had nurtured inside which was worse than any other emotion she nurtured inside which was worse than any other emotion she had ever experienced; if was even greater than the bitterness and rage which had hardened her soul. It was her best-kept secret, and she could not, would not, say anything that might reveal this hidden truth which tore savagely at her heart.

You see, the man on the other end of those 500 miles of telephone line was a man she had once loved more than any other in her universe. Long ago she had believed that he honestly and truly loved her, too. She now felt foolish that she had believed He would actually cherish her as she had cherished Him, admire her as she had admired Him, and protect her in His heart as she had guarded Him in hers; He was her First Love. She wanted to kick herself for blindly trusting that it would last forever, the perfect fairy tale. Fairy tales were for beautiful, enchanting women like Cinderella, Snow White, and Sleeping Beauty, and she knew she would not awaken to find Him standing above her and smiling with love in His eyes. She was not extremely gorgeous or witty, nor did she possess any characteristic of grand caliber, but she once had been convinced that she was special to Him simply because of who she was. Then came a dark day when she fell through the Looking glass and discovered ugly reality: He had chosen another.

Although days, weeks, even years had passed since that day, she still had no other to take His place. But that was not what caused the stabbing ache to puncture her heart. She had been rejected and abandoned, yet that was not the source of her terminal agony. This unhealing wound (oh, it appeared to heal at times, but then any incident - a phone call, a letter, a rumor reopened and inflicted the sore with even greater pain) was her hidden secret, and it was simply the fact that she could no longer share any words of true substance to this man to whom she had once been so very close. She refused to let Him realize that she still loved Him and wanted to be enfolded in His arms once again. She was determined not to reveal that her feelings consisted of anything more than polite words and phrases, although her heart did ache to tell Him otherwise. She did not want her heart to continue to grow hard towards Him. Perhaps if she told Him, her malignant tumor of bitter pain would finally disintegrate. She may even be able to have a real relationship with Him again if she could put aside the five-year-old memories of one steel gray March day when He said good-bye.

Every muscle in her body tensed and her heart pounded wildly; every part of her wanted to tell Him the truth that she still loved Him and desired to be close to Him again. She knew she would have to sacrifice her stubborn pride, and taking that risk was scary because it make her vulnerable. But she had to tell Him in spite of His deserting her. Her left palm was sticking to the telephone from the pouring sweat, and her other hand played nervously with the curly telephone cord. She felt dizzy and slightly nauseous, and her heart beat so fast she thought it would explode, but she

finally had begun to experience a peace she had not felt for years. She decided to tell Him. She took a deep breath and opened her mouth, and He asked, "How is school?" Another safe topic, she wryly thought. "It's great. How's work?"

"It's going well."

There was another small silence, though not for long; there were no other niceties to exchange.

"I suppose I had better go," He stated.

"Yes, me too," she reluctantly replied.

"I love you." She wondered if He only said the words to say them, or if He really meant them and was simply afraid of allowing any emotion to leave His heart nakedly exposed. She thought for a moment and then replied, "I love you too. Good-bye and Merry Christmas."

She heard the click of the receiver followed by the buzz of the empty line, but she continued to hold on for one moment longer. She then slowly released the phone and in a daze returned to the living room. She lay in the floor among the litter-torn paper once bright and shining, abandoned boxes once filled with gifts. She shut her eyes as if that motion would somehow shut out the pain, and tiny tears pooled in the corners of her eyes before they gently rolled down her cheekbones to the floor. Her mouth formed silent; words, it did not matter how loud she spoke because the message she was sending was one of the heart. "Why did my fairy tale have to end this way? There will never be any other to take His place. Why did it have to be like this? I still love Him. I still love you, Father. Can you hear me? I still love you...Daddy." She softly cried.

Anna Christine Vaughn

The Lawndale-Belwood Road

"ROCK'S COUNTRY STORE"

Look at the good old boys

Hanging around. Where?

There in the dark beside the store

Leaning on the truck.

They were out there the last time we came through.

In the rain, in the mist.

I bet they're out there every night.

It's Sunday. It doesn't matter.

I'll bet they're telling dirty jokes,

Talking about guns and cars.

Their time is like the road ahead

Vanishing into darkness every night.

They establish their tenuous dominance

In painless vulgar sparring.

The wounds run deep

And as far into life

As the road into the night.

I never bled.

On the Lawndale-Belwood Road ahead

The only lights reflect from signs,

And from a few dim windows

With frames silhouetted like crosses.

I know this place well.

They came from the windows,

They came with the darkness

As I did long ago.

I leaned there too

With others no longer in the dark,

And they vanish into the night behind us.

Les Brown

"All American Boy"

Sumi Wantanabe



Jericho

You never spoke of the one
who so wounded you with love,
yet she was there:
a ghost in your wary eyes,
in the faint lines that framed
Your mouth like sentinels
guarding every word.
Your practiced touch
and pretty lies were enough
for the smooth-skinned girls
you skimmed like foam.
But I wanted to hold
the sun in place for you;
a foolish Joshua to think
if I found the right notes
that just like Jericho,
your walls would come
tumbling down.

Joan Kyles

Mill-town Sunday

We ride oiled clay roads
Past the rusty combine and Mitch Jordan's hog pen
blooming with hollyhocks,
Past sorrel and chickweed
pushing through garden remnants of cotton farms,
To our usual graveled space.

In our stiff Sunday cotton dresses and French heels
we walk the hot, mud-streaked sidewalk into church,
Into cool quiet, into transformation.

Arching windows overpower reality,
diffusing by the beauty of their light.
The sanctuary glows with old familiar stories,
with holiness and order and truth beyond time.
We are surrounded by Moses and Joseph and the Good Samaritan;
the boy Jesus in the temple, Mary and the empty tomb.

The light shines through Christ in the Garden.
His stained glass white and crimson robes
glow with morning sun.
His praying face turns toward blue cobalt lead-fringed sky.
Our faces lift toward radiant Jesus,
Serene in the beauty of ceremony.

In a long low building
rows of steel machines with sharp slit-eyed needles
threaded and poised
wait in the vast dark silence.

Today their drone is deadened by the mighty roar of Bach.
Backs and fingers and weary eyes
yield to liturgy's demands.
Voices of praise rise in dignity.

Joyce Compton Brown

Novelette

Once I stood, proverbially speaking;
One foot in the gutter, the other in the grave.
Life merely a blur of decision and dishonest faces,
not even knowing mine own self well enough to
stumble with security, keeping myself to myself,
doomed to remain a devilish mystery as the pages
of an unread book.

Here I stand; just as untrusting, just as insecure,
but...

What made you open the cover?

Ren Chaskelis

Destined to be Trapped

How did I fit into this snug cage?
How did I get caught in the steel jaws
of this trap? I ran hard and fast
And even got away. I was successful and free
For such a long time. But then
I tripped, stumbled and fell. Now I have been caught,
Again. Just as sure as one gets away,
Will surely get caught, again!

Lynn Carpenter-Keeter

The Mighty Hunter

The mighty hunter stalks his prey.

Slowly lowering his body near the ground.

Hiding behind the thick patches of grass.

His prey, unaware that danger is near,

Continues to chew on a blade of grass.

The mighty hunter readies himself for the attack.

He firmly plants his feet on the ground.

Then suddenly, he leaps forward

Slapping his mighty paw around the helpless victim.

He surrounds it with his mouth,

Gently crushing it, careful not to kill it, yet.

He releases it and steps back,

Watching it struggle, helpless for safety.

Its huge back legs trying to jump, but cannot.

At the right moment,

The mighty hunter releases a swift slap from his right paw.

Then another, and another,

And an occasional smack with the left,

Until his prey is almost lifeless.

Then it is ready for consumption,

For no more pleasure can be derived from a lifeless creature,

Except the satisfaction of taste.

Gene Penner

An Alternative

Open your eyes
and stare at the sun.

Destroy an irreparable nerve.

That which is dead
cannot be disturbed.

Michelle Lynn O'Brien

Wise Words

Seeking shelter,
The Rolling Stones encouraged sympathy for the Devil
And John F. Kennedy embodied patriotism--
What could he do for our country?
Would Dylan have wanted us all to get stoned on the same
afternoon?
Neil Armstrong never told the direction of his Giant Leap,
And I will always wonder if Martin Luther King dreamed
in color

Deborah Ann Cravey

Jesus Who?

Take sufficient power to create
the universe with a thought;
Shape it into the form and
substance of a mortal man,
Subject it to hunger, thirst and fatigue.
Then, ask this superbeing if
He is willing to suffer
Degradation, humiliation, torture, and
a horribly painful death.
All for a people who will one
day place him second in
Importance behind a fat man in a
red suit.
The answer might surprise you.

Henry D. Styron

Reincarnation?

She took little for herself
And gave me all she could.
She led a simple life
And trusted in the Lord.
When she was taken with a stroke
I was many miles away
Driving madly through the bad weather,
Stopping only to refuel and for the siren of a cop
Who was sympathetic when I explained my rush,
I came as quickly as I could;
But my presence was of little use.
She lay three days without a word
And then her life was through.
I stood in silence looking on
With anger,grief,guilt,worry, and confusion
Striving each to rise above the other.
There was nothing I could do but remember
The radiance of a life that was good, though short.
Hurriedly I made my way to where my car was parked
On the way I met a smiling man
Who, without a word, handed me a cigar.
I held it for a moment and then with fogged eyes
I read the wrapper and then unleashed my grief-
The wrapper simply said, "It's a girl."
She must have come into the world
About the same time my mother left.
At least that's what I told myself-
When so distressed within, the soul reaches out to
find hope again.

Ernest Blankenship

American Dream

Success.

Dry minds age in homogenous buildings.

Conventionality.

Rewards await those who most efficiently
uphold the status quo.

Diversion.

An angel cries behind the mask of a devil;

Living color characters are imprisoned in two dimensional boxes.

Acquired tunnel vision ironically proliferates sterility
of heart and mind under the guise of responsibility and duty.

To this we pledge allegiance.

Michelle Lynn O'Brien

Sylvia and the Bees

"The old queen does not show herself, is she so ungrateful?"

Sylvia Plath

When the bees swarmed today I thought of you.

Did you watch fat careless drones tumbling from squash blooms,
not burdening themselves
with the necessary pollen

Did you note how they plop down at random hives
visiting at will,
sipping sweet concoctions forged from the labor
of thin, sharp workers

Did you notice their arrogance
in dismissing as unimportant
the evolution of the personal sting

And did you see the flight of the virgin queen,
soaring, spiraling upward,
drawing clouds of drones to her will,
choosing one to clasp for a moment before his return to earth
to crawl and die

So that her life might have order,
that she might live exalted, the *raison d'être* of thousands,
stroked, attended, pampered, as she bends
secure in her cellular task.

Joyce Compton Brown

To the Existence, "God"

I don't believe you actually exist
as those who do believe, tell me
But I can't deny you are an existence
as real as anything around me

I do see you in my classes
as learned experts relate your history
And I do sense your influence
as I read all the words, view all the arts

I have proof of your presence
as my friends cross the street holding your hand
And I hold evidence of your existence
as my fellows try conversion, or persecution

I perceive you as an entity
given life by a collective will
A cooperative agreement, like Zeus and Odin,
King Arthur and Charlemagne, or even Santa Claus

But to me, you have your own distinct existence
because I am within your domain
Sometimes, I feel, alone-- and I find
I cannot ignore your existence away

Craig Lewis

The Final Curtain

...As the cold hand of the night
squeezes the last bit of night from the day...

The stage curtain rises to reveal the great
powers of Darkness...

"Be wary oh you sleeping child,
Who dreams of darkened Moon,
Her temptation, and her beauty;
She'll steal your heart
with her silver spoon."

...Wherein your curiosity lies,
It will be found...
Exposed...

And molded into that which you cannot change.

For he whose heart aches for power
Hungers for material things;
You no longer belong to yourself...

"Be wary oh my evening child,
for the time is coming soon.
That cloven-footed Beast
walks proud through the night,
And stronger shines the Moon."

...The seventh act draws to a close,
And slowly now the curtain begins its cumbersome march
to center stage...

Pale faces turn, staring, wondering, they await the inevitable...
"Be wary laughing hypocrite,
Of the victory you think you've found.
For where will you be when the Moon's glow turns to red,
And the final curtain's down?"

Lisa J. Sabbarth

The 51st State

Cold numbs your fingers,
fright pierces through you
as sweat beads upon your face.

Your heart races frantically,
your hands shake in chaotic motion,
voice chatters in vibrating tones;
Feelings rush, nerves tingle!

Ah, the state of confusion.

Christy Diane Hart

The Tower

Climbing up toward the sun,
My thoughts becoming clearer.
'til at last I stand
Breathing the breaths of angels

Flying through the air,
Feeling free from all binds,
Allowing my thoughts to roam.
And ending all as I meet the ground.

Karen Martin

Easter, 1970

That's me on the right,
handsomely dressed,
with my two sisters.

Notice how they match
with their cute white dresses,
hats, and corsages.

I can't dress like them.
I have a male image to uphold.
Shirt and tie only, dresses won't do.

The glasses I wore were a must.
Without them
I'd have four sisters.

The couch in the background
is still there,
after shedding its skin several times.

The bare paneled wall,
which the couch rests against,
is now littered with trophies of the forest.

Gene Penner

Long Thoughts that in My Mind Doth Rest (After Sir Thomas Wyatt the Elder)

Elizabeth! My Glorious Liege, Thou Queen of ages past,
Hath held thy sway o'er hearts and minds of men
For far too long! Methinks thy reign should end!
Thy glory should be told in truth at last!

In fact, the glory of thy court was dast-
Ardly as all the others 'fore it. Even
though you spent some time locked in
Yourself, once sprung, compassion faded fast.

You killed young Tichborne, Southwell, too,
'Cause they were Catholics, but Francis Drake's
One million pounds from Spanish towns were stakes
Which you, Your Pious Highness, called your due!

In truth, My Liege, you were for sure a liberated broad,
But stories of your kindly beauty constitute a fraud.

Dennis Quinn

Who Decides What's Real, Anyway?

Outside the walls of Here and Now,
yet before the boundaries of
Notquitethen,
there stands a palatial hovel.

Within, the Old and the New
cavort as equals.

A very old man with a receding
forehead chats about the weather with
a high-tech warlock
wearing a cowboy hat.

The impact of their discussion
will be felt far and wide, or, perhaps,
not at all.

And the Angel of Death
sits morosely in a corner,
drinking another beer.

Henry D. Styron

"Ramesses"

Billie Ford Dixon



Tall Wooden Soldiers

Tall wooden soldiers standing in
Rows. Lines that stretch into
Eternity. Never bending. Just
Silent, straight soldiers.

Dawn Elaine Camp

Through the Pages of My Mind

Through the pages of my mind,
I see countless mirrors showing one of the same.
Round like the funnel my thoughts go, uncontrollable and colorless...
Serene and calm only in the dreams of my heart...longing to
Become a living reality though frightened by what may be discovered.
Each doorway offers multiple opportunities of dark and light...
Through the pages of my mind.

Sharon Nichols

Prince Without a King

Surrounded by past and present influences,
He would bring into existence
A prince without a king
A successor born of no queen
The next to don a mantle, sit upon a throne,
Without blood-ties, royal or otherwise.

A peasant boy
Who boldly strode up to venerable Merlin,
Proclaimed himself and refused apprenticeship;
Who freed splendid Excalibur from the stone
Before the startled and awed assemblage;
And who sat confidently, with a wisdom
Learned but untaught.

Craig Lewis

Fig Leaf

Rectitude
is no excuse
for the fig leaf
that hangs unsupported
on a Roman Copy.

Melissa Diann Brown

Pendulum

I leave my doors
unlocked at night now,
for perhaps a passing
someone who could want
what you refused. For lunch

today, I opened a dented
can of mushroom soup
(as much past its prime as I)
praying for some lurking
ancient plague which would excise
you from my mind. And lately,

I've taken to turning
off my car lights on dark country
roads: split seconds of delicious
fear that make me live again,
if only for a moment.

I cross streets more slowly,
too-- sometimes only getting
halfway before "Do Not Walk" bleeds
across the sign-- just in case
there is one car traveling
too fast
to stop
in time.

Joan Kyles

"Cottage"

Melissa Diann Brown

